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## Town's oldest citizen shares longevity secrets

By JOHN NOLAN

[jnolan@fosters.com](mailto:jnolan@fosters.com)

[jnolan@fosters.com](http://jnolan@fosters.com)

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STRAFFORD — After being presented with the Boston Post Cane earlier this month by dint of being Strafford's oldest citizen, Laretta K. Buddelmann was kind enough to share her secrets to living a long life.

The presentation of the prestigious gold-headed, ebony cane was made by the chair of the Board of Selectmen, Stephanie Gray, who also gave her a framed proclamation amid a standing ovation from friends, well-wishers, neighbors, relatives and town officials, with most of the audience filling two or more of these rolls.

Seated comfortably in Strafford's ultra-modern municipal building, the relaxed 99-year-old smiled, and in response to cries of "Speech" referred to notes that she had jotted down earlier that day.

"I attribute my old age to four things," she said. "The first is optimism. Be sure you have optimism, it prevails over evil."

As the audience nodded in agreement with that one, she continued, "Always have a sense of humor." She looked up from her notes over the faces, and chuckled.

"Third, I credit my mother. She always had a smile and never complained, but she did have the most wonderful children in the world," said Buddelmann, and chuckled again.

Her fourth secret was a little more allegorical. "Life is a long, long highway with a lot of exits. You have to choose the right exit, and that's not always easy," she said.

Now on a roll, Buddelman spilled out an unscripted fifth secret, that of having great friends and neighbors. She conceded that many of her friends were no longer around, but observed that she, herself, was "still hanging in there."

She paid tribute to her son, Ed King, who was in the audience, for being someone who does all her chores and shopping.

"And I thank my neighbors who look out for me," she added. She lives next door to former Selectman Lester Huckins and his wife Bertha, who were also in attendance at the ceremony.



**John Nolan/Times photo Strafford's oldest citizen, 99-year-old Laretta Buddelmann, reads the selectmen's official proclamation, while holding the Boston Post cane.**

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Then a sixth secret was revealed – good victuals.

"I was brought up on a farm, with cows and chickens and a vegetable garden and good well water, and we'd go blueberrying," said Buddelmann, putting her self firmly in the camp of the organic food crowd.

The seventh and final secret to Buddelmann's long and healthy existence is "Never waste anything." This was something that she learned during the Great Depression, which she described as "a terrible time."

With the eyes of the audience now occasionally straying to a table laden with mouthwatering delicacies, Buddelmann thanked everyone for coming, at which point her friends and neighbors gathered around her for a historic photograph.

"Tonight I feel famous," she said, as cameras flashed, "I've waited almost 100 years for this."

"She is a joy to go in and see. She is always smiling and happy," confided Lester Huckins, after the picture taking was over.

Town librarian, Historical Society vice president and lifelong Strafford resident Ken Berry also had words of praise for Buddelmann.

"She was a valuable asset to the youth of Strafford as a 4-H leader for many years," he said, talking from the experience of having been a member of her club as a youngster.

The honoree will reach her 100th birthday on July 10, 2011, having been born in 1911 in Peru, upstate New York. Buddelmann came to Strafford in 1944 and, in her words, "fell in love with the town."



**John Nolan/Times photo** Among the many people attending the presentation of Strafford's oldest citizen, Laurretta Buddelmann (seated) with the Boston Post Cane, were, from left: Ken Berry, Liz Evans, Cal Schroeder and Joann Brown, all of Strafford Historical Society, her son Ed King, neighbors Lester and Bertha Huckins, and Selectmen Steve Leighton and Stephanie Gray.

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